DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 211 280 RC 013 084

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TITLE "Work and Leisure in Country Schools in Wyoming." Country School Legacy: Humanities on the Frontier.
INSTITUTION Mountain Plains Library Association, Silt, Colo. Country School Legacy Project.
SPONS AGENCY National Endowment for the Humanities (NFAH), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 2 May 81
NOTE 21p.; For related documents, see RC 013 047-058 and RC 013 070-083. Paper presented at the Annual Wyoming History Day (2nd, Rock Springs, WY, May 2, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Centers; *Educational History; Elementary Secondary Education; *One Teacher Schools; Oral History; Rural Education; *Rural Schools; School Buildings; School Community Relationship; *Small Schools; State History; Teacher Background; Teacher Characteristics; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS *Country School Legacy Project; *Wyoming

ABSTRACT

The country school legacy of Wyoming is rich in history, folklore, and tradition. Materials (many anecdotal) gathered from school records, oral histories, autobiographies, and memoirs provide glimpses into the diverse and demanding role of frontier teachers (who were mostly female and, by contract requirement, usually single) and the work and leisure centered around the country schools of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. An accurate look at Wyoming reveals a frontier that ended by 1890 with the widespread presence of country schools providing roots and a sense of community. The 1890 Wyoming school census lists 16,291 students, aged 5 to 20. A 1915 survey records 63 brick or stone schools, 141 log or sod schools, 331 frame schools, and 22 teachers who did not answer the question. Recollections indicate teachers were involved not only in instruction but in janitorial work, rounding up stray cattle, extinguishing prairie fires, and assisting with haying. Tales show the school buildings, centrally located to keep travel distance equal for students, becoming the natural center for community life, serving as voting centers, town halls, churches, dance halls, and even the place in which to perform an autopsy. (NEC)

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"WORK AND LEISURE IN COUNTRY SCHOOLS IN WYOMING"
Western Wyoming College, Rock Springs, May 2, 1981

Second Annual Wyoming History Day
Sponsored by the
Wyoming Oral History and Folklore Association

by

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Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities

RC 013084

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Much has been written about the Frontier West with its gunslingers, Indian raids, wagon trains, and horse soldiers. Cold-blooded killers have been eulogized and placed on pedestals as heros. Calvalry officers who lost their way and led men mile after freezing mile in the wrong direction are remembered as great military strategists.

In novels and in history books thousands of wagon trains leave from St. Louis only to fall prey to marauding Indians, run out of water on the alkaline flats, or worse fate of all - be continued on next week's television programming.

The West as metaphor has been used and abused so often that it is increasingly difficult to tell Wild Bill Hickok from Annie Oakley, a hired gun from the local sheriff, and the wild, rampaging, savage Indians from the drunk and equally barbarous United States calvalry.

Enough has already been written about a West that existed more in fiction than in fact and whose early chroniclers, the dime novelists, readily saw an eager reading market among millions of easterners. The Cowboy West was a compilation of saddle sores, bacon and bisquits, and days on end without clean clothes or many companions. Contrary to Zane Grey, Max Brand, and Louis L'Amour, cowboys rarely rode into town to get drunk at the bar. When given the opportunity they rode to a general store and splurged on stewed tomatoes.

The West of a thousand novels and countless hollywood films never really existed. The Frontier officially ended in 1890 and the long cattle drives gave way to barbed wire and windmills. The cowboys became homesteaders and the Indians also tried in vain to take up the plow.

The 1890 Wyoming school census, age five to twenty years inclusive, lists: 7,518 native males, 6,488 white females, 1,142 foreign males, 935 white foreign

females, 116 colored males and 92 colored females. The open range had gone the way of the buffalo. The time was ripe for rural schools.

On this, the Second Annual Wyoming History Day, it is important to look not at a West that never was but at a Frontier in transition and that difficult time between the first barbed wire fences and the first black-topped highway.

The role of women in the West has never been clearly understood just as the settlement and development process has been ignored in favor of such iconoclasts as Butch Cassidy and Tom Horn. It is time now to leave the myth behind and to look at the West and Wyoming as the great land it is and to give creedence to the country school legacy because no other institution more successfully bridges the gap between the Indian pony and the black Model-T.

Part of the romance of the West had to do with a cowboy's mobility. Just as the boomtown syndrome has always typified parts of Wyoming, so single males could move on whenever the bunkhouse got too crowded. But a country school meant roots and a sense of community, and new opportunities for the children of ranchers as well as homesteaders.

The first school in Rock Springs was held in a private house with Mrs. Holliday as teacher. The blackboards were sheets of brown wrapping paper tacked to the walls and textbooks were scarce. As described in the Wyoming State Department of Public Instruction Release Number 21, 1940:

> " In 1874 District 4 was organized and a school house was built which served as a public gathering place for voting, dancing, lectures, etc. From the standpoint of the pupils this was unsatisfactory as the desks were not fastened to the floor, and after an event the evening before, there was always necessary much scrambling and hunting around for books, pencils and slates which had become misplaced when the seats were moved to make a place for dancing. The first teacher in this building was a man, about whom very little is known except that his tenure was brief. A story is told to the effect that he liked his morning toddy strong--and oftentimes imbibed too freely of it. It was upon one of these occasions, when he appeared thus at school, that the older boys could not resist the temptation to toss him outside through an open window where he was leaning attempting to retrieve a lost pencil from the ground below. This incident no doubt ended his short career at Rock Springs."

If teachers and drinking did not mix in Rock Springs, in many rural schools there were no windows to be thrown out of. Cora Beach in Women of Wyoming describes a school in Big Horn County:

> " Later the first school in that vicinity was held in the original cabin. The window had been taken out for the new house so they had a gunny sack over the opening in mild weather and a deer skin when it was very cold. There was one long bench upon which they sat in front of the fireplace. The teacher was Filmore Benefield."

Primitive teaching conditions were common and many women who migrated West were elevated to the rank of 'teacher'. Sarah Amelin Lyon Hall emigrated to Wyoming in 1878. She was one of the early teachers near Lander and she remembers:

> " I had 40 scholars between the ages of 5 and 16. It was so different from any school I had ever taught--an old building with a dirt roof, a few homemade desks and benches on three sides of the room and a table and chair were the only equipment. The books were odds and ends gathered from the sale of mavericks--they were called school ma'ams and were sold at auction to the highest bidder."

A great deal of work was involved in rural education in early Wyoming. Not only did community members struggle to assemble schools and pay teachers when they themselves had very little cash, but county superintendents had extreme difficulties in supervising their district schools.

Marion Tinker Dillon became superintendent of Sheridan Public Schools in 1896. In her autobiography she describes one of her visitations:

> " Especially do I recollect one trip which I made to visit a school on Lower Powder River, some twenty or twenty-five miles below Arvada. In the old days as now there were calamity howlers as to the cold, the loneliness of the road, etc. As I wanted to get an early start from Clearmont, I took a midnight freight, after being duly persuaded by my son-in-law, "Johnny" Taylor, to take his silver mounted revolver as protection (I had never shot a gun in my life, but to keep peace in the family I consented) that night. When I got on the freight I noticed a traveling man on the train with a satchel, a sort of a pasteboard contraption that we pioneers all had alike, in the way car.
>
> We got to Clearmont about daylight and after having breakfast, I was chagrined to find that my one-horse buggy was a two-wheeled cart and the horse a rack of bones.
>
> There was no road, and the wolves were so thick, I will confess that my heart almost failed me when I got started and saw the wolf tracks in the snow. I never saw so many. It seemed like thousands and no other tracks of any kind, but with a reassuring thought of the firearm in the pasteboard satchel in the bottom of the cart, I "budded up" the old horse, and when about noon I came to a dirt covered log house vacant, I knew I was on the right track.
>
> About four o'clock on this November day, I sighted another dirt covered roof, this time with smoke issuing from the chimney, and when I alighted and told them I was the County Superintendent, Queen Marie's welcome was no greater. I was ushered into one large room with the dirt floor pounded as hard as a rock. How good that supper of venison, biscuits and "spuds" tasted! But when I went to retire and opened my pasteboard contraption, alas! no night-gown, no revolver, simply socks, men's handkerchiefs and shirts. The traveling man had gotten mine instead of his and he had gone on to Newcastle or Alliance or somewhere, but the good woman loaned me a nightgown and I slept so well that night. How the oatmeal bobbed and sputtered and boiled all night and tasted so good! A couple of days later when I got back to Sheridan, I found my own satchel had been sent back to me."

If rural school supervision presented problems to county superintendents, at least they could return to town. Teachers, on the other hand, were forced to make do with existing conditions from the 1890's on up to the 1950's.

F.O. Ruch, teacher at Ruch-Town school 8 miles north of Hillsdale in Laramie county, had this to say when preparing his school for the session: "When school began October 20, the fence surrounding the yard was practically all down and had only half enough posts and wire. The flag pole, a jointed one, was in four pieces. The coal house door was off the hinges. . ."

Rosella Carson, superintendent of Laramie county rural schools, took a male teacher to his first teaching job and found the school building so dilapidated that when he surveyed the situation at the out-of-the-way ranch, he sighed, "I've lived on jackrabbit and beans for sixteen years, I guess I can do it again." The superintendent and the teacher cleaned up and plastered the walls so school could commence. The district bought the material and the teachers, patrons and pupils did the work.

The teacher could have been worse off. When Hannah Johnson arrived from Nebraska to teach in Daniel, Wyoming she found her school had four walls but no roof. It was spring and the ranchers were taking their cattle to the summer range, but they stopped their work to board the roof, however, the mail order roofing paper did not arrive before a heavy rain. The rain splashed down between the boards as the teacher taught from under her umbrella with the children continuing their work sitting under their desks.

In Wyoming, more often than not, the school was a log building with walls covered with muslin or burlap that moved frequently when the mice came inside to explore the interior. In 1915, Wyoming had 63 brick or stone schools, 141 log or sod schools, 331 frame schools and 22 teachers who didn't answer the question on the form!

Schools were frequently moved to accommodate shifts in population. In Carbon County, the Bunker Hill School was moved so many times that the logs were numbered from one to ten so that they could be easily put back together. The school was moved in 1934 to Sage Creek above the Irene Ranch; in 1941 to Matson's Ranch; and finally to the Coudin Ranch where it now stands on a knoll. Parents and school board members all worked to help move the school. On a daily basis teaching school also involved hard work. In pre World War I days, the contract lasted as long as the school district had money. Once the money ran out, after three or four months, school would close and the teacher would be sent home until the district raised enough money to start over again. Janitor work was carried out by the teacher, and sometimes she was paid for it, or she could pay a student to help her. The stove had to be tended and the fire started before the children arrived at the school.

Some of the new girls came from homes where they had never started a fire and the intricacies of building fires had to be learned. The Hyatteville school records contain a rather elaborate drawing showing how to operate the school stove. The drawing showed how to fill the humidifier on the stove and open the window to give proper ventilation to the firebox. It is one frustrated artistic teacher's legacy to her professional sisters. Hopefully the gift was appreciated, but the records are silent on the matter.

Even buildings constructed especially as schools were not oases of warmth in winter when temperatures dropped as low as 50° below zero. J. Stuart Brown's schooldays are recalled in Fairview school in Lincoln county in 1924: "A wood burning, pot bellied stove front and center supplied the heat. Near the stove the temperature might be as high as 90° while in the rear of the building in extreme weather it would be near freezing. In the winter our feet were usually cold. We performed certain physical exercises several times a day that helped

warm our lower extremities."

Catherine Baberg Anderson recalls the numbing cold of the school on Elk Mountain in Carbon County despite a hot stove in the middle of the room. The sandwiches in their dinner buckets were frozen hard as a rock.

Teachers also helped with the house work and cooking in times of need. There are stories too of teachers helping with rounding up stray cattle, putting out prairie fires and assisting with haying. An experienced seamstress teacher was put to work sewing underclothing for the rancher's daughters.

Lucille Preston was part of a haying crew for a Laramie county rancher during World War II when help was scarce. Grace McMillan helped the rancher's wife round up the cattle to save them from a prairie fire.

Janitorial duties in the country school had to be assumed by the teacher. Some sewed their own curtains from whatever materials they could find. Floors were swept with a sweeping compound, and the oil and sawdust mixture was an olfactory remembrance which many teachers carried with them long after their rural teaching careers.

If no springs or pump was nearby, the teacher and students carried a jar of water to school each day. It was used principally for drinking, but in some instances a dirty pair of hands was washed. Teachers recall hoarding water with which to wash chalkboards. If a spring was nearby, it was good as water could be collected in a barrel and dipped out into a bucket kept in the school building. But this could also present a problem as illustrated when a teacher in Albany county found this note when she went to get the school supply of water, "Do not use, a rabbit fell in last night."

It was usually a long day that started early and ended late.

> I drove out from Cody every day and had to start the fire so planned to be there by 7:30. Most of the children came at 8:30 from quite a distance by school bus so they were cold and needed a warm

building. I also cleaned the room after school each night for the first year, but after that the school board agreed to hire a high school boy who lived close by to build fires and clean.

Some teachers found that although they were willing to do things for the community, the school board interpreted civic activities in a light that often produced surprises for the young teacher.

> The teachers' contracts included a question of 'What can I do for the community?' I had been a church organist (piano and organ) for a few years and I answered the question that I could provide instrumental music. Well--the first Saturday I was taken to the local pool hall!!! and was told I was the music for the Saturday night dance. Well, that was a flop. But to keep my teaching job I learned to play a few popular tunes and a new tempo.

The community, students, and board members could keep close watch on the teacher and she had little chance to get outside of her contractual duties.

> Teachers were expected to be at the schoolhouse no later than 8:30. Usually, by necessity, she worked until almost dark and if she didn't carry home a load of books and papers to correct, she was probably very remiss and the school board knew it. Of course, all the janitor work was done by the teacher.

With or without teaching experience, often the rancher's wife became the teacher. Her teaching duties were carried out along with the house work. One recalls putting her small child to sleep in the woodbox while she taught school.

Dorothy Hecox described her daily routine like this when her husband was out carrying the mail: "On mail days we would have school for two hours in the morning, then the children and I would bundle up, go out and feed the chickens, feed and water the work horses, clean the barns, and then we would run over to the sheep and throw off some hay for them. Now we were ready to return to the house for lunch and another two hours for home work."

Without a doubt country school teaching involved hard work. In the early days nearly every ranch where there was children had a school. At Germania, now called Emblem, the older children weren't allowed to go to school as long as there was any work they could do at home with harvesting or spring plowing. For

many children, school meant a reprieve from rugged ranch work and they welcomed the opportunity to attend class and be with their friends.

* * * * * *

From the earliest days country schools functioned as community centers, and were the source of leisure activities for almost all rural Wyoming residents.

Because the rural school was often the first public building in an area, it was a natural setting for community meetings. In the same vein, as the teacher was one of the earliest and sometimes the only paid employee with public funds, she became the unofficial director of a number of district affairs and the building became the center of those activities.

School buildings preceded churches in many communities, and there are a number of reports of buildings used for prayer meetings and church services, usually non-denominational. Some of the services were conducted by itinerant preachers, a latter day circuit rider.

While there are no records of funeral services held in a rural school, Ingleside school in the Iron mountain area of Laramie county, boasted of a marriage ceremony when Gunmar Andersen, a hotel commisary clerk, married Lil the cook. A Baptist minister came from Cheyenne to perform the ceremony.

Harmony Church in Albany county held many of their church affairs in the Harmony school because the church was difficult to heat.

In Boulder, Wyoming, while no funeral was held, the school was used in which to perform autopsies. When a town citizen, Ben Walker, was murdered by Jack Walters, the body was laid out on the floor and a decision made on the cause of death. Students remembered that the floor had blood stains and set several desks over that part of the floor. The body was later exhumed for further study, and the school used again.

Meetings held in the schools were for the Cattlemen's Association, Union, Grange, Home Demonstration, Red Cross, Women's Clubs, and Water Board. To this day, many farm-oriented clubs call themselves by the name of the one-room school in which they first met. Early telephone and ditch companies also followed

school district boundaries and took their names from the school.

That there was a school in a certain location, did tend to form the area into a community, whose activities extended from the school, but were not necessarily held at the school building. The school facility was usually provided by the family or families needing the school.

With the advent of the homesteaders, population was heavier, and there were more children to go to school. Communication and transportation improved, school buildings were constructed by plan and with tax monies. They became the Center for community activities to the extent and in the manner desired by the individual community. Some gathered at the school only for the Christmas Program put on by the school and the "End-of-School Picnic" in the Spring. Others used the schoolhouse for Box-Socials, Pie-Socials, School Board meets, Meetings about water, telephones and roads, Literary Societies, Dances, cardplaying and Sunday School and church. Some communities felt the school building was for school and should be used for nothing else. Some felt it belonged to the community and should be used for everything. Between the two extremes, fell most of the country schools.

Whether used for anything else, the school programs, by the teacher and pupils for the entire countryside were important as a social happening. "This was the only chance we had to get together and visit".

The central location of the school within the district, necessary to keep travel distance equal for students, tended to make the school a logical site as a voting center, town hall, church, and social center. A cursory glance at the Park County school records for several schools indicates that the constant shifting of school district boundaries was an attempt to keep up with shifting centers of population. Most schools were built so students would not have to walk over four miles to attend.

The shifting population often resulted from the simple introduction of a new crop such as sugar beets that required Russian and German immigrants for labor: a population that would be reflected in the community dances held at the schools where the dances would includes waltzes, two steps, schottishes, polkas, and square dancing.

The schools were also the center of card parties which were a pleasurable means of getting people together, even if they were not on the best of terms, and the proceeds from the entertainment would be used to buy new books and equipment for the school; a method of school financing that seemed preferable to the raising of taxes which would stay on the books forever.

The hard daily work of farming and ranching also made people more conscious of the need for some form of relaxation. The children themselves enjoyed school for that reason, and the adults, especially after a long and hard winter, felt the need to meet neighbors and friends. It was the parents who supported the school as a community center and participated in the preparations for meals and in making interior arrangements for things like Christmas programs and graduations. Given the Wyoming bent for the practical, these community affairs were also fund-raising devices for the purchase of new school equipment or field trips for the students.

Socials were held in the school house - box lunch socials, cake walks, raffles and popularity contests. Many times these affairs were instigated by the teacher to raise funds for extra books, playground equipment, a phonograph or even a piano. Jelm school in Albany county had a pie social to purchase a full sized wall map.

Box suppers were probably the most popular money raising affairs in the country schools. The girl who packed the lunch usually put in enough food for four and decorated the box with tissue paper and ribbon. It was against the

rules for the girl to tip off the boy which box was hers, but sometimes a hint to one she liked such as, "I only had yellow ribbon" was enough.

One teacher recalls the box she prepared for the social was held upside down by the auctioneer.

Margaret Hoglund Coe wrote about her experiences at the Upper Sage Creek School:

> " Sometimes in reminiscing, the ones that are still around think of the Church services held in the old school house; the school programs; the spelldowns with Lower Sage Creek School and Mountain View School; and the picnics, where almost all came back smelling of wild onions and garlic, and a few bunches of wild flowers, a mouse or two to drop in someone's pocket, a smile and a feeling of happiness at being alive on such a beautiful day."

Christmas programs were always the highlight of the year in rural schools. These were much appreciated by the patrons and the mistakes provided chuckles for weeks afterwards.

It was a break from the monotonous routine of school, and teachers and students alike recall beginning practice soon after Thanksgiving for the recitations, songs and short skits. An example of how important the program was is shown by this incident. Nina Keslar Finley, suffering from whooping cough and not able to attend the Christmas program, was bundled up in cloaks and blankets and taken by buggy to the window of the school where Santa Claus plucked a doll from the tree and presented it to her.

When a school had too few pupils, several schools in the district would combine to put on a program at a central location. The Palmer Canyon Dance Hall, a log building in Albany county, was used. Mrs. Boberg Anderson remembered a place, the Garden Spot Pavilion, a dance hall used for Christmas programs in Carbon county. As a student she could not comprehend a man who sat and stared at the candle-lit tree. Later she discovered he was the fire watch! Before

electricity trees were decorated with candles which burned. Buckets of water were set close by to squelch the flame should the tree catch on fire.

In another instance, it was not fire but firewater problems at a Christmas program. One cowboy had agreed to play Santa Claus, but had stopped along the way at a ranch or saloon for some Christmas cheer. His antics at the program were the topic of conversation for weeks to come.

There were other bugaboos in Christmas presentations besides fires or inebriated cowboys. At one program a teacher had two angels come through an open window; one made it, the other got caught in the opening.

When one teacher forgot the names of her students in the program, she was fired.

A Christmas program held on an unusually cold and stormy night kept all but a few at home. Those few who made it kept bundled up in wraps and overshoes as the students went through their lines. After the program, the teacher served cold punch, and soon after a new and warmer school was built. In addition to those at Christmas, other programs were presented. Spelling bees, arithmetic contests and debates were held in the schools. Robert Wallston recalls a literary program at Burns school in Laramie county with all local talent. A story recounted in a Rock Springs paper tells of an untimely end to a spelling bee and program when a cowboy rode into the school house on his horse. A debate in a rural school in Uinta county discussed the topic: "Is a load of seed potatoes or a load of women most needed in the community?"

Although Christmas programs were the most popular, the end of the year school day was one that everyone in the community participated in whether they had children or not. Parents who had traveled long distances felt the entire day should be given over to pleasure, and a picnic usually capped off the graduation ceremony. This was also a time to reward scholarship and attendance and

the county superintendents tried to make the ceremonies as impressive as possible.

Award certificates were signed by the superintendents and presented by them, if possible. It was expected that the teacher would organize the graduation ceremony and picnic. Before the advent of student evaluation by testing, many teachers dug into their own pocketbook to come up with momentos of the occasion. These were usually little books or pamphlets that were adorned with standardized engravings of patriotic or religious themes and poetry that emphasized good citizenship and a love of education. These small tokens of appreciation are the most prized possession of many former country school students. Other holidays were handled in the same manner. Anna Schlick Ballard remembered:

> " My third year of teaching was at the Owen school fifty miles north of Douglas. Rosalie Brewen had a lively school six miles away. We had several joint projects. One delightful experience was our Easter egg hunt. Rosalie and I bought many chocolate chickens and rabbits so each child would be able to find at least one chocolate candy. The mothers dyed eggs. Rosalie and I were overwhelmed with the milk pails full of colored eggs. We hid them around the school house and let the little ones hunt on one side, the older children on the other. Wyoming sage brush has never yielded such treasures!"

Easter egg hunts may have provided leisure activities for the school children, but the adults loved to dance! Verna Saban states:

> " I remember attending dances at the Lower Beaver Creek schoolhouse, riding with an escort down the creek several miles. Once we even rode twelve miles to Shell town to a dance -- I believe it was an election dance in 1926. During my second term at Beaver Creek the people of the community, with a yen for some entertainment, had a series of 'surprise parties' -- unexpectedly converging on some ranch home. Furniture was pushed aside, somebody played a fiddle or an organ, or even just a harmonica, and all danced, chiefly square dances, until nearly morning. Of course, getting to these parties was by means of horses on a wagon or a sleigh, or horseback since the roads were not passable for cars. Children were loaded into the conveyance and taken along, and put to sleep when they tired, at the dance."

The dances were the main attractions through the year and the teacher often

hired the fiddler and planned the refreshments. These were truly community affairs, and even though some families frowned on dancing, it was done with great pleasure. Margaret Dempster writes:

> " There were many gatherings at the schoolhouse during the years. At Christmas and at the end of the year there were programs, parties, and dinners. The favorite gatherings were dances. Mrs. Bates played the organ or piano, Mrs. Boermer played a mouth harp, and Mrs. Stall sang and kept time for dancing. They called this group the Pumpkin Center Orchestra. Sometimes Pete and Byron Stall had to work the bellows by hand to keep the music going on the organ. Sometime the Borners moved their piano over on a sled for extra music."

Wanna Clay Olson tells of coming to Wyoming in 1919 from Missouri to teach in a log school. A dance was given in her honor at a "nearby ranch" about ten miles away. She described the welcome at the dance: "As my party of friends arrived, all the cowboys greeted us with shooting their six-guns into the air just for my welcome. Scared and excited would hardly describe my feelings. Two brothers furnished the music, each taking his turn playing the accordian. Just before daylight, we went home."

Dances often followed the socials. Mrs. Agnes Hemburg recalls as a student the desks at Lone Star school in Uinta county were moved off to the side to make room for the dance. Edna Roberts, on a committee to raise funds for a new cemetery in Pine Bluffs, suggested a dance. Some wag suggested it could be called the "grave yard ball."

That the community gatherings were well attended speak to their value in an isolated community. The enthusiasm which people entered into the program was evidenced often by the damage done to the building or other signs of audience approval. At the old Evergreen school in Hot Springs, Pete King remembers the gasoline lanterns going out during a dance because the dust raised by the enthusiastic dancers clogged the air vents in the lanterns. The dancers were forced to take a rest!

If country schools were the source of leisure activities, the rural school marms themselves were equally coveted in a lonesome land where cowboys grew tired of singing to their cattle.

Teachers followed the railroad, the rancher, and the homesteaders to the wide open spaces of Wyoming. They came for a variety of reasons. Their searches were for land, for romance, for adventure or for better paying jobs.

Teaching was, as some expressed, the one respectable job for a woman; being able to live on a ranch was an incentive for a girl to come to Wyoming. A male dominated area was also an attraction for a single teacher.

Wes Johnson said in his memoirs, "The schoolmarm brought culture and refinement into a raw land. Many young cowboys with romance as their object and also a wife swallowed their chewing tobacco while popping the question. Because there were schoolmarms for boys to marry the West settled faster."

How many teachers were influenced by Owen Wister's novel, The Virginian, cannot be determined. Some claimed to have read the novel; some said it had affected their move to Wyoming. Wister's image of the cowboy as a knight of the range instead of a hired man on horseback was somewhat unrealistic; but the portrayal of Molly Wood as a school teacher from the East dropped into a vast, unknown West was probably of a more reliable nature. There are those who believe that the model for Wister's heroine was Mary A. Wright who arrived from the East in 1885, although there were several other teachers in the area of Medicine Bow when Wister was researching the story.

The tales of bashful, tongue-tied cowboys checking out the new school marm are innumerable. A much recounted anecdote is the one of the cowboy who wants to meet the comely new teacher. With reins in hand he raps on the door of the teacherage inquiring the direction to a certain ranch by the name of the brand. The teacher reads the brand on the horse, and hints that the horse might know

the way. Cowboys would knock on the door for a variety of reasons, but what they were really seeking was a glimpse of the school marm.

May McAlister had answered an advertisement for a teaching job near Kemmerer. She had read about the cowboys, but had met none until being entertained at a school board meeting. A group of big-hatted, suntanned men skidded their horses to a stop before the picnic tables. She recalled they needed but one invitation to stop and eat.

She and her teacher friend, Nell Yates, were more impressed with a young man they met on the train from Denver. It was J. C. Penney who also came to Kemmerer for a different job, a different adventure - to buy the first store which was to become a great merchandise empire.

Nell Yates, while impressed with J.C. Penney, found it more practical to marry a mandolin playing cowboy, Joe Ewer. He had presented her the band from his "ten gallon" hat which the petite Kansas lass used as a belt.

When Alvina Gluessig came from Wisconsin to teach at a ranch school in Wyoming, a Texas cowboy, George Lucy, swept the schoolhouse floors on weekends and started the fire in the pot bellied stove each frosty morning. Eventually they married and took up homesteading. The first summer they lived outdoors and covered their four poster bed with a canvas canopy; they ate their food off a barn door set on logs. To make ends meet they trapped coyotes for bounty.

On another occasion, a teacher and her cowboy were unable to get to the county seat at Cheyenne to get a marriage license. They enlisted the service of a railroad conductor who made the run from the small community to town where he purchased the license and brought it back on the next train.

A teacher who had come to Iron Mountain, Wyoming to meet a cowboy possibly received more than she bargained for. Tom Horn was a cowboy who made the ranch dances to check out the school marms. He was remembered by teachers as an

excellent horseman, first rate cowboy, and gentleman. Clendoline Kimmel, a new teacher from Missouri, became infatuated with Horn, who was also a hired gun. When he was brought to trial for murder, Miss Kimmel became a star witness. In an attempt to save Tom Horn, she accused the son of the rancher with whom she was boarding of the murder. She was to be tried for perjury, but left Wyoming for Missouri. After Horn was found guilty and hanged, the charges against her were dropped.

Not every teacher was interested in marrying a cowboy or even meeting one, but there were enough matches made that school boards instituted caluses in contracts which prohibited teachers marrying during the school year. A few documents prohibited marrying for three years. In an attempt to keep the teacher from sowing the seeds of matrimony, a clause was inserted in some of the contracts forbidding the teacher to take out of the district trips for pleasure.

Despite the contracts, a number of teachers did marry and some were allowed to stay on as a teacher after marriage. Some districts had more trouble with keeping teachers due to marriage than others. Piny had six out of seven marry during one school year. Edington in Albany county was referred to as a "mating ground" because of the great turnover due to marriage.

Truly the Country School Legacy in Wyoming is rich in history, folklore, and tradition. Parents and community members worked hard to build and equip pioneer schools and it was those schools that became centers of the community on the vast stretches of Wyoming mountains and plains.

Work and leisure in country schools is a fascinating topic that opens up new interpretations of Wyoming history and defines the true role of the country school teacher and her intrinsic involvement with the settlement of the West.

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